INTO THE BURNING SUN

Icarus receives an amazing power. Can he handle it?

Based on the classic Greek myth of Icarus and Daedalus
By Spencer Kayden | Illustrations by Gary Hanna
CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play. *Indicates large speaking role.

*Stage Directors 1, 2, 3, 4 (SD1, SD2, SD3, SD4)
*Daedalus, an inventor
*Icarus, Daedalus’s son
All, to be read by a group
Pasiphae, queen of Crete
Captain
Scholar
*Minos, king of Crete
Minotaur, a horrible beast
Guards 1, 2 and 3
Athena, a goddess

As You Read
To have hubris is to have excessive pride and ambition. Look for examples of hubris in the play.

SCENE 1

The Tower, the Island of Crete

SD1: In a dark room with stone walls, Daedalus crouches over a table. A few candles burn nearby, casting eerie shadows.

SD2: As Daedalus works, his teenage son, Icarus, lies half-awake on a thin mat. Both are gaunt and pale.

SD3: A feather floats down through a high window. Daedalus eagerly snatches it and returns to his work.

Daedalus (to himself): Just a few more feathers, and we will be free.

Icarus (groggily): What did you say, Father?

Daedalus: Nothing. Try to sleep, my son.

Icarus: When was the last time you slept?

Daedalus: There will be time for sleep later. If I don’t finish making these wings, we are both dead men.

SD4: Icarus watches a rat scurry across the floor.

Icarus: Are we not dead already? Surely, this cold, dark prison is our grave.

Daedalus: You will feel the warmth of the sun again.

Icarus: I hardly remember the sun. It’s been many years since King Minos locked us in this tower.

SD1: A pained expression flashes across Daedalus’s face.

SD2: He returns to his work, using melted candle wax to glue the feather to the wing. The lights fade.

SCENE 2

King Minos’s Palace, Crete

FIVE YEARS EARLIER.

SD3: The lights come up on an opulent party.

SD4: Daedalus and Icarus enter in their finest clothes.

All: Hooray, Daedalus! Hooray!

Pasiphae: All of Crete thanks you for the glorious new palace you have built us.

Captain: With the sails you added to our ships, no one can match our speed.

Scholar: I can see all the way to the stars with the telescope you created for me.

Pasiphae: And the statues! They are so lifelike we had to tie them down to keep them from wandering off.

All: Ha ha ha ha ha!

Pasiphae: A toast to Daedalus, our Master Craftsman.

Minos: May your inventions continue to make Crete the most powerful kingdom in the world.

All (raising their goblets): To Daedalus!

SD1: Daedalus bows. Icarus smiles proudly at his father.

SD2: Suddenly a sound like thunder rumbles in the distance.

Minotaur (offstage): Rooooaaaaww!

Icarus: What was that?

Minos: It’s nothing to worry about.

Minotaur (offstage): RRRROOOOOOAARRRRRR!

SD3: Minos plaster a smile on his face.

Minos (loudly): Please! Remain calm, everyone. Stay here and enjoy the festivities. (quietly to Daedalus) Follow me.

SCENE 3

The Royal Garden

A FEW MOMENTS LATER.

SD4: Minos brings Daedalus outside to the royal garden, which is surrounded by an iron fence.
SD1: A group of guards rushes over.
Guard 1: It escaped again!
Daedalus: What is going on?
SD2: Just then, a hulking beast stomps into the garden. It has the head of a bull and the body of a giant man.
Minotaur: Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr...
Guard 2: Stand your ground, men!
SD3: The beast tears a tree from the ground and hurls it at the guards.
Minotaur: Grunt! Snort! Grunt!
Minos: Do something, you fools!
SD4: The guards throw spears at the Minotaur, but the beast is impervious to their weapons.
Minos: Control it, or you're all going to the dungeon!
SD1: The guards rush at the beast, but it easily swipes them aside.
Guard 3: Everyone out of the garden!
SD2: They rush through the gate, the Minotaur close behind. A guard slams the gate shut just in time.
Daedalus: Where did this horrible creature come from?
Minos: I was supposed to sacrifice my prize bull to the god Poseidon. But I chose a lesser bull instead. Poseidon became so angry that he cursed me with this beast. He even named it the Minotaur—after me.
Guard 1: We've been trying to keep the beast a secret, to avoid a panic.
Daedalus: Can't you kill it?
Guard 2: Not without getting killed ourselves.
Guard 3: Sire, this gate will not hold the beast for long.
SD3: Minos turns to Daedalus.
Minos: Build me something to contain the beast—a place from which it can never escape. But be discreet. No one can know about it.
SD4: The Minotaur roars and shakes the fence.
Minotaur: Rooooaaaaawr!
Daedalus: I will get to work immediately.

SCENE 4
A Street
LATER THAT EVENING
SD1: Icarus and Daedalus are walking home.
Daedalus: Its horns are as sharp as razors. And its eyes are pure death.
Icarus: How awful! What are you going to do?
Daedalus: I will build something so clever, so perfect—
Icarus: That your name will be praised forever?
Daedalus: Well, I was going to say that the Minotaur would be trapped forever.
SD2: They continue on.
SD3: Icarus takes a small mechanical bird from his pocket. He pulls the tail and the wings flap.
Icarus: This is my favorite of all the toys you've made.
SD4: He runs ahead, holding up the bird as though it were flying. Then he stops and turns back.
Icarus: They say you are the cleverest of men.
Daedalus (smiling): Do they now?
Icarus: You turn trees into ships and rocks into tools and stone into palaces.
Daedalus: Yes...
Icarus: You see the world around you, and from it make incredible things.
SD1: Icarus turns the toy over in his hands.
Icarus: Is it not possible that one day you could make us fly?
SD2: Suddenly, there is a great flash of light and the goddess Athena appears.
Athena (in a booming voice): Little mortals! Do you not know the path of hubris? It leads only to destruction!
Daedalus: Great Athena, we meant no disrespect.
Athena: I come with a warning. Daedalus, your inventions give humans great power. But remember that some powers are not yours to give.
Minos: A maze. How delightful!
Icarus: The Labyrinth is completely dark inside. You must feel your way along the high stone walls.
Daedalus: The paths are full of so many twists and turns, you are soon lost.
Minos: And the Minotaur?
Daedalus: Trapped inside.
Minos: You are certain the beast cannot escape?
Daedalus: Yes, I am certain.
Minos: Surely, there must be some way out.
SD2: Daedalus and Icarus flick their eyes at each other.
Daedalus: No, sire.
SD3: Minos gives a nod. The guards grab father and son.
Daedalus: Your majesty? What is the meaning of this?
Minos: Daedalus, you have built me more than a cage for a monster. You have built a prison for my enemies.
Icarus: Your enemies?
Minos: Indeed. What could be better punishment than a maze of death? But it would hardly do for them to find the way out. (to the guards) Take them to the tower.
Daedalus: You don’t have to lock us up!
Minos: Do you expect me to believe that the creator of this maze doesn’t know its secrets? Just be grateful I am letting you live. (to the guards) Away with them.
Icarus: No! Please, sire! No!
Minos: Say goodbye to the sun, for you shall never see it again!

SCENE 6
The Tower
FIVE YEARS LATER
SD4: The action picks up shortly after where Scene 1 ended. Icarus is now sleeping.
SD1: On the table sit two pairs of enormous wings made from feathers, wax, and leather sandal straps.
Daedalus (to himself): We put on the wings, fly out the window, and we’re free of this prison and that tyrant Minos.
SD2: Daedalus stares at the wings.
Daedalus: I cannot help but think of Athena’s warning. If we do this, we will incur her wrath.
SD3: Daedalus walks over to Icarus.
Daedalus: But if we stay here, we will die. Surely, Athena will understand.
SD4: He gently shakes Icarus.

Icarus (waking up):
Are they finished?
Daedalus: Yes. Here, try them on.

SD1: Icarus puts on the wings, flaps his arms, and begins to rise up from the ground.

Icarus: They work! Father, I am a god!

Daedalus: Do not boast, Icarus. And remember, do not fly too close to the sea, or the spray will wet the feathers.

Icarus: Yes, Father.

Daedalus: And do not fly too close to the sun, or the heat will melt the wax and the wings will fall apart.

Icarus: I understand.

Daedalus: Here we go!

SD2: They flap their arms and fly through the window.

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**SCENE 7**

**The Clear Blue Sky Above the Sea**

A FEW MOMENTS LATER

SD3: Father and son soar through the sky.

Icarus: Fresh air! Sunshine!

SD4: Icarus dives down and then swoops up.

Daedalus: Remember, not too low and not too high.

Icarus: I know, I know.

SD1: Icarus does loop-de-loops. He cannot contain his excitement.

Daedalus: Careful, Icarus!

SD2: Icarus flies higher.

Daedalus: Come down, son!

Icarus: Woohoo! We're freeeeeeeee!

SD3: Icarus soars higher and higher.

Daedalus: That's too high!

SD4: Icarus is getting closer and closer to the hot sun.

Daedalus: ICARUS! STOP!

SD1: But it's too late. The wax on Icarus's wings melts.

SD2: Loose feathers fill the sky. The boy starts to fall.

Icarus: Faaaaaaterrrrrrr!

Daedalus: Nooooooooo!

SD3: Icarus plummets into the sea.

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**SCENE 8**

**The Island of Sicily**

ONE WEEK LATER

SD4: Daedalus is carving designs on a great wooden door. His wings rest on the ground nearby.

SD1: Athena appears before him.

Daedalus: Great Athena, as my humble offering, I am building you a temple and giving you my wings. I shall never fly again.

Athena: Did I not warn you? Hubris brings misery.

Daedalus: But why punish my son? I made the wings.

Athena: He was not capable of wielding the power of flight. Only the gods can do that. But take heart. The sea where he fell shall now be known as the Icarian Sea. And stories of you both will be told for thousands of years.

Daedalus: What does fame mean now, without my son? Athena: You will see your son again, in the afterlife.

SD2: Athena vanishes.

SD3: Daedalus sinks to his knees and looks up into the bright sun. ☀️
RECONSIDERING ICARUS
by Jennifer Dignan

Imagining staring at the rough stone walls
and the cold dirt floor
listening to the laughs and screams
of hyenas just outside.
Did it not require
a measure of hubris to think
"I will find another way"?

Absent outsize ambition
outsized courage
outsized confidence
would we ever have left our caves?

And everything that followed—
pyramids and ocean crossings
the Mona Lisa
Shakespeare's plays
horseless carriages and electric lights
heart surgery, airplanes, iPhones
rockets blasting into space—

would any of it have come about
had no one ever dipped
into the spray of breaking waves
or soared to where the sun could melt
the wax on their beautiful wings?

Explanatory Essay Contest

In Scene 4, Athena says: "It is a wise man who knows his limits—and does not attempt to reach beyond them." How is this idea developed throughout the play? How does the poem offer a different point of view? Answer both questions in an essay. Use text evidence. Send your essay to Icarus Contest. Five winners will each get Greek Myths and Mazes by Jan Bajtlik.